



Functional Foods

Food with an Extra Kick!

Functional food is a relatively new term in the area of nutrition but it is gaining interest among nutritionists and consumers alike. The term functional food is defined by the Institute of Medicine's Food and Nutrition Board as "any food or food ingredient that may provide a health benefit beyond the traditional nutrients it contains." Some of the naturally-occurring chemicals, or components, that provide the health benefits of functional foods are referred to as phytochemicals. Studies are still being conducted to determine the exact role of these food components in disease prevention. Functional foods have been associated with the prevention and/or treatment of the four leading causes of death in the US, which are cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension. Certain functional foods have also been shown to help memory function. As an older adult, functional foods can be very beneficial. Statistics show that 87% of older Americans have one or more chronic diseases that can be improved with nutrition therapy including cancer, diabetes mellitus, high blood cholesterol, chronic lung disease, osteoporosis, obesity, high blood pressure, dementia, and congestive heart failure.

The list of functional foods, their components or phytochemicals, and the health benefits they provide continues to grow. Some examples are:

.....tomatoes and tomato-based products which contain lycopene may help to prevent heart disease and cancer of the prostate, colon, bladder, and pancreas

.....broccoli which contains sulphorophane may help prevent breast cancer

.....soy foods (such as tofu, soy milk, soy flour) contain isoflavones which may reduce the risk of cancer

.....oats which contain beta glucan may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) by lowering blood cholesterol

.....flaxseed and nuts which contain omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of CVD and improve mental and visual functions

.....fish such as tuna and salmon contains omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of CVD and improve mental and visual function

.....blueberries may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease

There are no official recommendations set for functional foods. Yet, there is no harm in adding functional foods to a balanced diet. On the other hand, researchers have concluded that dietary supplements that contain the components found in functional foods in isolated form do not have the same effects as eating real fruits and vegetables.

It is agreed by many in the health profession that functional foods are no magic bullet and cannot be used to make up for poor eating habits but there appears to be benefits to adding them to your daily diet. With the variety of functional foods it's easy to incorporate them into your diet all day long. The following is a sample menu illustrating use of functional foods.

<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Lunch</u>	<u>Snack</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
Oatmeal	Tuna	Almonds	Salmon
Blueberries	Whole wheat bread		Steamed broccoli
Flaxseed	Tomato slices		Baked sweet potato
Soymilk	Romaine lettuce		Pasta Veg Salad
	Orange		Mixed Fruit
	Milk		Milk

For further information:

-International Food Information Council

<http://ific.org/proactive/newsroom/release.vtml?id=18801>

-Rutgers University Extension (Nutrition document FS942)

www.rce.rutgers.edu/pubs

-Recipe ideas

www.5aday.com